

**ILLINOIS DOCUMENTATION FOR UNUSUAL BIRD SIGHTINGS**

Submitted to Illinois Ornithological Records Committee (IORC)

**IORC RECORD  
NUMBER:**

This form submitted as supporting documentation of (check all that apply):

2019-001
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X Unusual species

1. **SPECIES:** Slaty-backed Gull
2. **Number of birds:** One **Age/sex/plumage:** Adult in basic plumage.
3. **Date(s):** 16 February 2019.
4. **Location (include county):** Calumet River, Chicago (Cook County).
5. **Observers:** Walter Marcisz, Michael McNamee, Jayne Leone.

**Documenter: Your name:** Walter Marcisz

**Mailing Address:** [REDACTED]

**Email Address:** [REDACTED]

**Others agreeing with identification:** All agreed.

**Observers NOT agreeing with identification:** No dissenting opinions.

6. **Description of bird, including size; shape; proportions; details of both color and patterns on head, back, chin, throat, breast, flanks, undertail, wings, and tail, etc.; coloration of soft parts (bill, eye, legs and feet). Include only details actually seen in the field:**

I arrived at the Stony Island overlook over the Calumet River (just south of Deadstick Pond in Chicago, eBird hotspot "Lake Calumet area—Calumet River Turning Basin #5") at 2:20 pm on 16 February 2019. Mike McNamee & Jayne Leone were already there when I arrived. I was looking for Glaucous and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, so they got me on a Glaucous Gull and several Great Black-backed Gulls, and that was a good start. After scoping a bit more, I found the continuing adult Herring X Great Black-backed Gull (hybrid) sleeping on the ice. Jayne kept looking to see if she could find a Lesser Black-back for me. In short order, she & Mike pointed out a distant adult black-backed gull on the water that appeared to be about the same size as some of the surrounding Herring Gulls (and definitely smaller than some nearby HERGS). I got my scope on it, but this was no Lesser Black-backed Gull. It also wasn't a Herring X Great Black-backed Gull. Straight, thick, dull yellow bill with a red mark at the gonys; overall stocky build; white head with only a dark streak through the eye & a slight dusky "neck boa" on the nape; immaculate white breast, underparts & tail; blackish (but not black) mantle; relatively short folded primary projection; very broad white tertial crescent & broad white scapular crescent. Adult Slaty-backed Gull! Fortunately, Mike & Jayne photographed the bird when I walked back to my car to get my camera. Mike & Jayne each obtained photos that I believe are diagnostic for adult SBGU. Andrew Aldrich arrived a bit later, then Pat Durkin, Randy Shonkwiler, and others, but the SBGU had unfortunately already left the area by the time I returned to the river with my camera (it apparently had flown off to the west per Mike & Jayne). It is worth mentioning that the total counts of "winter" Larus gulls we found at this location on the afternoon of 2/16/19 were rather stellar: ~250 Herring Gulls, 1 (adult) "Thayer's" Iceland Gull, 1 (adult) Slaty-backed Gull, 6-7 (4-5 adults, 2 imm.) Glaucous Gulls, 15 (mostly adults, but also several imm.) Great Black-backed Gulls, and 1 (adult) Herring Gull X Great Black-backed Gull (hybrid).

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7. **Description of behavior:** Seen on the water of the Calumet River, swimming or resting. It eventually flew off, but I did not see it in flight.
8. **Description of vocalizations:** Not heard.
9. **Description of immediate and surrounding habitat(s):** Deep river channel, partially iced-over.
10. **Viewing conditions:**  
**Optical equipment used for observation (type, power):** Swarovski 80mm spotting scope (20-60x).  
**Distance/how measured?** ~500 meters (distance measured on Google Earth map).  
**Time(s) of observation:** ~2:30 pm **Total time of observation:** ~10 minutes.  
**Weather (including regional or national weather patterns if relevant)/ sky conditions/ relative position of the sun:** 30 degrees F., overcast, light wind, sun high in the sky with diffuse lighting (no strong contrasts), bird was front lit as seen in attached photos.
11. **Previous experience with this species and similar species:** Over some 55 years of birding I have previously seen only 2 other adult Slaty-backed Gulls, including one at Calumet Park, Chicago on 30 December 2010 (many observers, accepted by IORC), and one at Calumet River, Chicago on 4 & 7 January 2018 (many obs., accepted by IORC). I have several decades of field experience with WEGU, LBBG, & GBBG. I have considerable field experience with HERG X GBBG since 2016. I have no previous field experience with WEGU X GWGU, KEGU, or HERG X KEGU, but I have carefully studied many photos of these forms.
12. **Please eliminate other similar species and/or hybrids (use additional paper, if necessary):**  
Given the circumstances, coloration of legs/feet was not seen, and I also did not see the bird in flight, therefore no views of the primary pattern on the open/spread wing. Regardless, I honestly believe that Michael McNamee's & Jayne Leone's photos are diagnostic for adult Slaty-backed Gull.  
Western Gull (adult) has massive, blob-ended bill; clean white head (no dark streak through eye).  
Western X Glaucous-winged Gull (adult) has massive, blob-ended bill; much paler mantle.  
Lesser Black-backed Gull (adult) is much slimmer, with narrow tertial crescent & long primaries.  
Great Black-backed Gull (adult) is larger, with clean white head and narrow tertial crescent.  
HERG X GBBG (adult) is larger, with much paler mantle and rather narrow tertial crescent.  
Kelp Gull (adult) has massive bill; clean white head (no dark streak through eye); blacker mantle.  
Herring X Kelp Gull (adult) has much paler mantle; rather narrow tertial crescent.
13. **Where photos obtained? Yes. If so, by whom?** Mike McNamee & Jayne Leone **Attached?** Yes.
14. **Books & illustrations consulted, and advice received. How did these influence this description?**  
Sibley (2014), Howell & Dunn (2007), and Olsen & Larsson (2004). In the end, I believe that all of these references strongly support my ID conclusions.
15. **How long after the observation were field notes recorded?** Immediately.
16. **How long after observation was this form completed?** One week.
17. **Additional remarks:** I have access to clear photos of adult GBBG, HERG X GBBG, & HERG X KEGU (all photographed at Calumet River, Chicago) if needed for comparison. Let me know.

**Signed:** Walter J. Marcisz **Date:** 22 February 2019.

FORM REVISED April 2015

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1. Slaty-backed Gull (adult) with adult Herring Gull, Calumet River (Turning Basin #5), Chicago, 2/16/19. Photo by Michael McNamee.

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2. Slaty-backed Gull (adult) with adult Herring Gulls, Calumet River (Turning Basin #5), Chicago, 2/16/19. Photo by Michael McNamee.

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3. Slaty-backed Gull (adult) with adult Herring Gull, Calumet River (Turning Basin #5), Chicago, 2/16/19. Photo by Jayne Leone.

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4. Slaty-backed Gull (adult) with adult Herring Gull, Calumet River (Turning Basin #5), Chicago, 2/16/19. Photo by Jayne Leone.